



Representative **Dave Schmidt**



44th District The 1998 Agenda



Dear Friends,

Winter 1998

You deserve a government that finds creative solutions to the problems we face in our communities. Right now, our most pressing problem is transportation. Anyone who drives in the 44th District knows how difficult it can be to get around. We have problems on Highway 9, where traffic is gridlocked every morning and evening; along the Mukilteo Speedway; and of course, on SR 522, one of the most dangerous highways in the nation.

The solutions we adopt must take full advantage of existing resources. Because of a strong economy and Republican-sponsored tax reforms, the state budget has a revenue surplus of \$861 million. One of the main topics we are discussing in the early days of the session is the best way to use this surplus.

In addition to budget issues and transportation, we have the pressing matters of education and crime to consider – all in the space of a 60-day session. This newsletter describes how the Legislature will address these key issues in the coming weeks. Please take a moment to read it, and don't hesitate to share your ideas, questions and concerns with me via phone, letter or e-mail. It's an honor to serve as your representative, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Dave Schmidt
Dave Schmidt

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Rep. Dave Schmidt

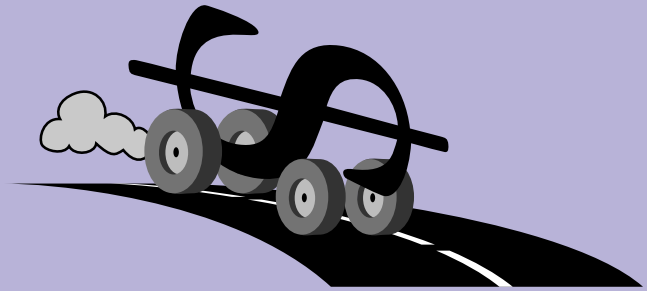
Transportation proposal funds road improvements with no tax increase

The people of Washington do not support a gas tax increase to pay for transportation projects. We have seen the same result in polls and surveys across the state. Last year, a gas tax increase was briefly discussed. Had it passed, the 44th District would have received more needed projects and dollars than any area of the state.

However, I understand the public's position. People see that the state has a \$19 billion budget. They believe we should be able to find money for road projects from existing sources. Furthermore, when the state has a budget surplus of almost \$1 billion, it doesn't seem right that citizens should be asked to pay higher taxes.

These are legitimate viewpoints, and I think the Legislature is listening to them. Republicans have outlined a transportation package that funds projects **without raising the gas tax**. Our plan matches the governor's \$2.4 billion proposal dollar for dollar, with one significant difference: He raises the gas tax. We don't. We also provide a larger cut in car license fees. If passed, you will have an opportunity to vote on this package in November. The plan includes the following elements:

- cutting the annual Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) by up to \$45 per year;
- transferring MVET revenue from the state general fund to transportation;
- shifting the funding source for local criminal justice and other social services from MVET to the state general fund; and
- re-enacting Initiative 601 at the ballot with revisions to (a) permit the MVET transfer without affecting criminal justice and other vital spending, and (b) strengthen and clarify I-601 by requiring a two-thirds vote of the Legislature for all future amendments to the initiative.



Cutting the cost of car tab fees

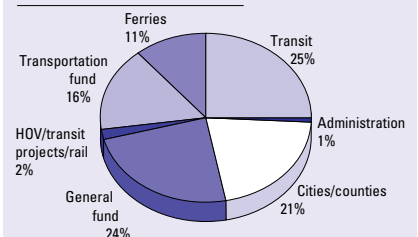
Citizens who complain about excessive license tab fees have a point. These fees — known as the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax — are among the highest in the nation. We want to change that. The average working family pays property taxes, sales taxes, gas taxes and an assortment of other fees to the state. After paying so much, it is understandable that citizens become frustrated with paying yet another fee just to drive a car to work and back.

A portion of MVET revenue — roughly 24 percent — goes to the state general fund, and pays for expenses unrelated to transportation. Only a fraction of the MVET revenue goes to the transportation fund — the funding source for road projects.

People reasonably assume that a tax on vehicles should pay for transportation expenses, especially when we have so many projects that require attention. Because past practice has been to divert MVET money away from road projects, we can reverse that policy and reduce the fees at the same time. Our proposal would cut license tab fees by \$45 per person, and shift more money directly to road improvements.

MVET Distributions

Total 1997-99: \$1.59 billion



The 1998 Agenda

Cracking down on drunken drivers

We cannot repair the tragedies caused by habitual drunken drivers, but we can do more to prevent them from getting behind the wheel of a car. I expect to see several proposals this year that would expand the penalties for DUI offenses. Here are some of the ideas the Legislature will discuss:

- Require certain people convicted of drunk driving to operate only vehicles equipped with ignition interlock devices
- Authorize impoundment and forfeiture of vehicles operated by individuals with a suspended or revoked driver's license
- Authorize impoundment of vehicles whenever a driver violates DUI laws
- Increase fines and jail times nearly threefold for people convicted of DUI, and add extra penalties for repeat offenders.
- Require a motorist's driver's license to be administratively suspended for 90 days without exception for a first DUI conviction

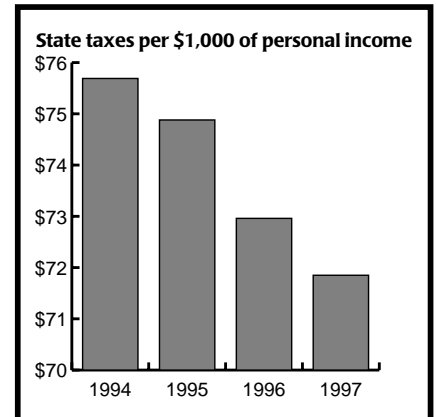
A commitment to literacy

When children can't read, they can't learn. That's why our priority in education continues to be improving the literacy of our K-12 students and encouraging parental involvement. Recent test scores among fourth-grade students show that less than half of them met the standards of reading ability for their age.

In the Legislature, we have been making reading education a top priority for the past several years. Key legislative leaders have been making a real crusade out of correcting the problems in the way reading is now taught, and bringing effective, research-based techniques back into each and every classroom.

Fiscal restraint + strong economy = \$861 million surplus

You can expect us to hold the line on state spending this year. Our budget is about \$150 million below the Initiative 601 spending limit, and we want to keep it that way. Since Republicans took control of the House of Representatives in 1995, we have seen a sharp decrease in spending growth, along with an upturn in the state economy.



These twin trends have led to one of the largest budget surpluses in recent memory: \$861 million. Many people wonder what the state will do with this "extra" money. Of course, there are those who can find any number of creative ways to spend it all. However, the general consensus is that we will set aside a large portion of the surplus — more than \$500 million — for a "rainy day," meaning an economic downturn. As I explained earlier, some of the remaining money may be used for transportation improvements.

The quest for efficiency

Some of you may remember that I have been working on bringing managed competition to the arena of government service. We want to see private-sector-style competition among our agencies, in order to ensure that you receive the best possible service at the lowest possible cost. This is a long-term project however, and it will require cooperation from the governor's office before we see any tangible results. Negotiations progress slowly, and we may not achieve our goals this year. This issue requires persistence. I hope we can follow the example set by the city of Indianapolis, where managed competition is now the rule rather than the exception.

A record to remember

We don't pass bills and forget about them. Results count, and after we set policy, we make sure it translates to results. Part of our job this year is to implement the major policy reforms we passed in 1997. We have a strong record to build on for 1998. Here's what we'll be monitoring this year:

SPOTLIGHT ON NEW POLICY

What to watch



• **Juvenile justice reform**

- Tougher sentencing standards
- Sentencing alternatives, including boot camps
- Mandatory parental involvement in juvenile court cases
- Juvenile justice grants for local communities

• **Property taxes**

- Temporary 4.7 percent cut in state rate becomes permanent in 1998 (Referendum 47)
- Local governments must vote publicly before raising property taxes above inflation rate

• **Welfare reform**

- Time limits on benefits (five years over one's lifetime)
- Requirements to work, search for work or perform community service
- Child-care assistance for working parents
- Job training
- Teen parents must live at home and progress toward a diploma or GED to receive benefits

• **Budget**

- Holding the line on spending